Study Notes for the Sunday Mass Published by Christians for Christ Ministries. We are a non-denominational Christian ministry that seeks to encourage and facilitate Christians in studying the Holy Scriptures. **"For there is one God and one mediator between God and mankind, the man Christ Jesus."** 1 Timothy 2:5

Mass Study Notes for Sunday, 2-28-2016



Welcome back to the Sunday Mass notes for **2-28-2016**. Why do bad things happen to "good" people? In the Gospel reading today Jesus addressed a related question posed to Him by the crowd except with a twist. Their question was whether when bad things happened to people were they worse sinners than the ones who avoided the same fate? We will see how Jesus cut to the heart of the matter, the people's universal need for repentance and faith for the forgiveness of sin. This week we also look at a story of Moses in the Book of Exodus and a passage from 1 Corinthians which relates another story from Exodus.

Introduction to the First Reading:

The first reading is from the Book of Exodus. The context of the reading is Moses' calling by God to lead the Hebrews out of their captivity under the Pharaoh. In chapter 1, after the Israelites had settled in Egypt under Joseph's guardianship (in the seven-year famine), "there arose a new king in Egypt who did not know Joseph" (Exodus 1:8). After Moses saw the injustices being done against his people, he killed an Egyptian who was beating a Hebrews (Exodus 2:12). After he fled from the Pharaoh who found out about it, he helped Jethro's daughters water their flock (Exodus 2:17). Afterwards, Jethro, "the priest of Midian," gave his daughter Zipporah to Moses as his wife (v. 21). Thereafter he had his first son Gershom there in the land of Midian during this time of his first "exodus" because of his flight from the Pharaoh. All of this is leading up to today's reading in chapter three which begins the period of time known as "The Exodus" during which Moses under the direction of God led the Hebrew people out of Egypt. In today's reading we see Moses' first

recorded experience with a divine revelation from God which happened during his stewardship of his father-in-law's flock.

First Reading:

Note: Verses 8b – 12 that were omitted from the reading have been included below.

Exodus 3:1-15 NAS95 1 Now Moses was pasturing the flock of Jethro his father-in-law, the priest of Midian; and he led the flock to the west side of the wilderness and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. 2 The angel of the LORD appeared to him in a blazing fire from the midst of a bush; and he looked, and behold, the bush was burning with fire, yet the bush was not consumed. 3 So Moses said, "I must turn aside now and see this marvelous sight, why the bush is not burned up." 4 When the LORD saw that he turned aside to look, God called to him from the midst of the bush and said, "Moses, Moses!" And he said, "Here I am." 5 Then He said, "Do not come near here; remove your sandals from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground." 6 He said also, "I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." Then Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God. 7 The LORD said, "I have surely seen the affliction of My people who are in Egypt, and have given heed to their cry because of their taskmasters, for I am aware of their sufferings. 8 So I have come down to deliver them from the power of the Egyptians, and to bring them up from that land to a good and spacious land, to a land flowing with milk and honey, to the place of the Canaanite and the Hittite and the Amorite and the Perizzite and the Hivite and the Jebusite. 9 Now, behold, the cry of the sons of Israel has come to Me; furthermore, I have seen the oppression with which the Egyptians are oppressing them. 10 Therefore, come now, and I will send you to Pharaoh, so that you may bring My people, the sons of Israel, out of Egypt." 11 But Moses said to God, "Who am I, that I should go to Pharaoh, and that I should bring the sons of Israel out of Egypt?" 12 And He said, "Certainly I will be with you, and this shall be the sign to you that it is I who have sent you: when you have brought the people out of Egypt, you shall worship God at this mountain." 13 Then Moses said to God, "Behold, I am going to the sons of Israel, and I will say to them, 'The God of your fathers has sent me to you.' Now they may say to me, 'What is His name?' What shall I say to them?" 14 God said to Moses, "I AM WHO I AM"; and He said, "Thus you shall say to the sons of Israel, 'I AM has sent me to you.'" 15 God, furthermore, said to Moses, "Thus you shall say to the sons of Israel, 'The LORD, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you.' This is My name forever, and this is My memorial-name to all generations.

In the reading, we see Moses receiving direct revelation from God, first in the form of a sign (a bush burning but not consumed) and then in the form of the voice of God calling him by name (v. 4). This was the formal calling of the prophet Moses for the specific purpose of delivering the people from their oppression in Egypt (v. 10). Moses questioned God as to how he, as a humble man, could ever accomplish such a great task (v. 11). In contrast to the proud characteristics often exhibited in leaders such as the Pharaoh, we see in Numbers 12:3 how Moses was called the most humble man on the earth. God answered Moses by giving him a sign, saying that once he led the people out of

Egypt that he would worship Him again at this same mountain (v. 12). Again, Moses questioned God asking what he should tell his people about the Person from whom he received his commission to deliver them from their oppression. God answered, ""I AM WHO I AM" (v. 14) and to tell them that "I AM has sent me to you" (v. 14). Finally, God connected His "I AM" name, the self-existent One, to the lineage of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob (v. 15). In addition to the introduction of the "I AM" designation for God, in verse 2 we also see the use of the word "LORD." This word when used in all capitals denotes the Hebrew word (without vowels) "YHWH," the "tetragrammaton," often translated Yahweh. The first occurrence of this word is found back in Geneses 2:4 and then in 15:6 in which it says about Abraham, "And he believed the LORD and it was counted to him for righteousness." "YHWH" is a reflection of God's divine being, His self-existent nature, something made clear in His words to Moses. This bounding of the reading by opening and closing it with the word "LORD" (v. 2, 15) and the introduction of the heretofore unknown name for God of "I Am" indicates a very strong expression of the sovereignty of God in directing the affairs of Moses to accomplish God's purposes. Moses was to be God's chosen agent to affect the freeing of the Hebrew Nation, the one through whom God would pour pronouncements of blessings to those who obey and curses for those who didn't.

There is plenty that we can we learn from the reading that we can apply to our lives. God works through the lives of frail, imperfect people, like Moses. Although Moses sinned in the killing of the Egyptian (Exodus 2:12) God used him in spite of his sin. If God can use a humble man like Moses to accomplish His purposes, we should assume that God would use ordinary people like ourselves in working out His plan. Second, when God places a specific calling upon our life He expects our obedience, but it's okay to seek answers to our questions. In our day and age, we can seek guidance from a variety of sources when we sense that God has placed a specific calling upon our lives. These include direct statements from Scripture, principles from Scripture, counsel from godly people (especially those with whom we collaborate in praying), and sensing the circumstances that God has placed in our lives. In the reading, we saw how God used Moses' circumstances to lead him to the exact spot to which he needed to be.

Introduction to the Second Reading:

In this reading, Paul sheds light on these allusions from Israel's past for those of us who are reading this as Gentiles, without the history of the Jewish people as our backdrop. He gave an explanation about the water, manna, and the people's unbelief using a quote from the Old Testament Book of Exodus from which we read in the first reading. Paul's readers would have been familiar with the Old Testament events surrounding the Exodus. Keep in mind the context of chapter 10 in that it follows Paul's explanation of the legitimacy of his apostleship, having just confronted the Corinthians over a very serious matter of sin in their church (see 1 Corinthians 5:1).

Some background on the manna is helpful to understand the big picture and the application to Jesus Christ. The word "manna" in Hebrew means "what is it." As you can imagine, this was an

extraordinary way for God to provide for His people. God seems to work in very unexpected ways. In the desert, the Hebrews collected the manna for the first five days of the week that then went bad overnight. However, on the sixth day God provided a double amount of a special type that was preserved for a two-day period in order to provide for a Sabbath rest day. In the spiritual sense Jesus is our special manna, the one who provides our eternal Sabbath rest (Hebrews 4). Yet, like us, the people God led out from among slavery during the Exodus sinned. Yet, this wasn't an isolated instance of grumbling. It says in Exodus, "The whole congregation of the sons of Israel grumbled against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness" (Exodus 16:2). In spite of their hard hearts, God heard the people and answered by telling Moses that He would "rain bread from heaven for you" even in the case when they did not obey Him (Exodus 16:4), which He knew they wouldn't. Moses explained to them that their complaints weren't against him but against God (Exodus 16:8). God made a special provision to provide for the Sabbath by making the manna quantitatively different (a double portion) on the day before as well as qualitatively different – it would not spoil during the Sabbath rest day. God then announced the miracle to Moses through the appearance of the Shekinah glory, which the people saw (Exodus 16:10, c.f.). In the meantime, in the evening before the raining of the manna from the sky began, God sent quail to the people (Exodus 16:13). The text concluded with the people seeing the manna and not recognizing what it was until Moses explained it to them (Exodus 16:15).

Second Reading:

Note: Verses 7 – 9 that were omitted from the reading are included below.

1 Corinthians 10:1-12 NAS95 1 For I do not want you to be unaware, brethren, that our fathers were all under the cloud and all passed through the sea; 2 and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea; 3 and all ate the same spiritual food; 4 and all drank the same spiritual drink, for they were drinking from a spiritual rock which followed them; and the rock was Christ. 5 Nevertheless, with most of them God was not well-pleased; for they were laid low in the wilderness. 6 Now these things happened as examples for us, so that we would not crave evil things as they also craved. 7 Do not be idolaters, as some of them were; as it is written, "THE PEOPLE SAT DOWN TO EAT AND DRINK, AND STOOD UP TO PLAY." 8 Nor let us act immorally, as some of them did, and twenty-three thousand fell in one day. 9 Nor let us try the Lord, as some of them did, and were destroyed by the serpents. 10 Nor grumble, as some of them did, and were destroyed by the destroyer. 11 Now these things happened to them as an example, and they were written for our instruction, upon whom the ends of the ages have come. 12 Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed that he does not fall.

Paul wanted New Testament believers to understand the spiritual heritage and to learn from the mistakes that led to disbelief and rejection of God's provision for their lives. Had the people not been so hard hearted they could have better understood God's provision through the spiritual "manna" that was Christ (v. 4). Yet the Hebrew people in the desert continued to sin, and the sin had dire consequences for them. The heart of the matter was this. "Now these things happened to them as an

example, and they were written for our instruction, upon whom the ends of the ages have come. Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed that he does not fall" (vv. 11-12).

There are many spiritual parallels in this reading between the provision of God through the manna and the person and work of Jesus Christ who, called Himself "the bread of life" (John 6:35). In spite of the fact that the people grumbled against God He still provided food for them. The parallel in the New Testament is that in spite of the fact that most of the people didn't accept Jesus as their Messiah, God still provided salvation through Him. The manna was a very unique provision that was done only by God and could not come about by any natural means. In the same way, Jesus was God's supernatural provision and also did not come about by natural means but was instead born through the power of the Holy Spirit.

Another point in the reading concerns Paul's use of the term "spiritual rock" (v. 4). When Paul said "they were drinking from the spiritual rock" and "the rock was Christ" (v. 4) both times he used the word "petra." Jesus was the foundation stone, the One Who provided sustenance to the Hebrews escaping from the Pharaoh during the Exodus. Jesus Himself explained the necessity of a sure foundation in Luke Chapter 6. " Everyone who comes to Me and hears My words and acts on them, I will show you whom he is like: he is like a man building a house, who dug deep and laid a foundation on the rock; and when a flood occurred, the torrent burst against that house and could not shake it, because it had been well built. But the one who has heard and has not acted accordingly, is like a man who built a house on the ground without any foundation; and the torrent burst against it and immediately it collapsed, and the ruin of that house was great" (Luke 6:47-49).

Finally, Paul stated, "*these things happened to them as an example, and they were written for our instruction, upon whom the ends of the ages have come. 12 Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed that he does not fall*" (vv. 11 – 12). The meaning of this is self-evident. We should take great pains to 1. Become familiar with Scripture so that we even have the principles to apply, and 2. Actually, apply them to our lives by learning from those that went before us. Why do we continue to sin when we know so much? Perhaps a better question is, why does God continue to use sinners like us? We know that He does, but this doesn't lessen the call of holiness that God has placed upon our lives.

As we transition to the Gospel lesson, we will learn about the ultimate consequence of the unforgivable sin, the forsaking of repentance of sin and belief in the forgiveness offered only through faith in Jesus Christ.

Introduction to the Gospel Reading:

The Gospel reading is chapter 13 of Saint Luke. The context is after Jesus' long discourse on the truths of the good news of the Gospel in contrast to the heresies and legalism taught by His antagonists the Pharisees. Jesus told them to "Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy" (Luke 12:1b). The Pharisees thought that they had contrived the secret code for living a

faith-filled life, which at its root was hypocrisy (Luke 12:1). In contrast to the Pharisees' law code derived in secret, Jesus taught publicly. Jesus said, "But there is nothing covered up that will not be revealed, and hidden that will not be known" (Luke 12:2). He told them not to fear those that could kill their bodies (i.e. the Pharisees), but to fear the One that could after they were killed cast them into hell (i.e. God). They were not to fear the Pharisees and their hypocritical legal code, a portion of which we will see in today's reading.

Gospel Reading:

Luke 13:1-9 NAS95 1 Now on the same occasion there were some present who reported to Him about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mixed with their sacrifices. 2 And Jesus said to them, "Do you suppose that these Galileans were greater sinners than all other Galileans because they suffered this fate? 3 "I tell you, no, but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish. 4 "Or do you suppose that those eighteen on whom the tower in Siloam fell and killed them were worse culprits than all the men who live in Jerusalem? 5 "I tell you, no, but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish." 6 And He began telling this parable: "A man had a fig tree which had been planted in his vineyard; and he came looking for fruit on it and did not find any. 7 "And he said to the vineyard-keeper, 'Behold, for three years I have come looking for fruit on this fig tree without finding any. Cut it down! Why does it even use up the ground?' 8 "And he answered and said to him, 'Let it alone, sir, for this year too, until I dig around it and put in fertilizer; 9 and if it bears fruit next year, fine; but if not, cut it down.'"

Jesus confronted the people's false doctrine that bad things happened to bad people because of their sin. He did this by giving them the truth of the Gospel. The big idea in the reading is that the people whom the tower fell weren't worse sinners, but that **everyone** was in need of repentance and finding faith in Jesus Christ as the only means of forgiveness for their sin. Jesus told them, "unless you repent, you will all likewise perish," (v. 3), meaning spiritual not physical death. Scripture tells us, "it is appointed for men to die once and after this comes judgment" (Hebrews 9:27). Jesus was clear that He was the only way to God, and He said this using the same language about Himself that we saw in the first reading, meaning Jesus is God. He said, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me" (John 14:6). Jesus closed the reading by revealing God's patience in waiting for His people to bear fruit, meaning to repent of their sin and come to the knowledge of eternal life (vv. 6 – 8). Scripture tells us that "The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance" (2 Peter 3:9). Although there may be points of light in all religions, the only way to God is through faith in Jesus Christ – exclusively by becoming a Christian. This may not jive with the politically correct culture in which we find ourselves today, but the fact remains that this is the truth of God.

We shouldn't dismiss the fact that God judges sin, whether it's in the life of a believer or a non-believer. In our day, God operates according to the New Covenant in which he prunes believers during their earthly lives (John 15:2) while storing up His judgement for unbelievers largely until the

end of their lives (John 15:6, "cast in the fire and burned"). Even during the Old Testament times, God revealed His grace for the unbelieving world by lavishing His material blessings upon them, although their eternal destination was hell. This is very clear from both Psalm 37 and Psalm 73. God calls us to remember those who went before us, such as the story of Ananias and Sapphira in the Book of Acts (Acts 5:1-11), or Paul's teaching about some being sick and some have died because of their unholy behavior in the love feast and communion meal (1 Corinthians 11:30). A key point that we need to see is that there are consequences for sin, but not in perhaps the ways we can imagine or according to the ways the people (including the Pharisees addressed in the adjacent verses) contrived.

As Christians just because we do everything right doesn't mean that we will be blessed in the earthly sense in which we might expect, including material blessings and protection from sudden death. Instead, God allows challenges in our lives to lead us to a fuller relationship with Him including the death of loved ones (our ourselves) in order to accomplish His purposes. Our Christian lives are not like baking a cake. We can't just put together the exact right ingredients using a measured formula and follow the recipe exactly and have the cake turn out perfectly well each and every time. Sometimes God throws a monkey wrench into our plans in order to achieve His purposes. What's more, we may not even know or understand these purposes during out natural lifetimes. Unlike the Pharisees who taught salvation by works and outward obedience to their own set of laws, God calls us to walk in faith alone while behaving in ways as directed by the Holy Spirit. This does include closely understanding the biblical principles taught in the New Testament and the Ten Commandments of the Old. However, we should not live our lives formulaically, doing things for God and expecting Him to "bless" us on our terms. He will surely bless us, but His definition of blessing is a lot broader than our limited perspective. May we learn to walk by faith and not our feelings or our sight.

Many of us have had nice young men dressed in white shirts wearing nametags and backpacks knock on our door. The Mormons, although very well intentioned, teach a doctrine similar to that confronted by Jesus in the Gospel reading today. Would you recognize false doctrine when it knocked on your door? As we ponder what Jesus said about those that perish, we have to remember that we are not just talking about the false doctrine of Mormons, Jehovah Witnesses and Muslims, but anyone who holds the doctrine that good works cause salvation rather than flow from it (Ephesians 2:8-9). Jesus taught us not that we shouldn't judge but rather than when we do judge we are to use a righteous standard (John 7:24, Matthew 7:2). Jesus was clear that belief in Him is the only way to God, and that many would not travel this road. Less we think that those in our community are immune, we can say that many who claim Christianity truly live as practical atheists except they go to church on Sunday while negating Christian principles and practices during the week including prayer, fellowship with other Christians, study Scripture, following God's calling for them (Ephesians 2:10). Jesus told this group, "Many will say to Me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles? And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; DEPART FROM ME, YOU WHO PRACTICE LAWLESSNESS'" (Matthew 7:21-23).

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Bottom Line: Questions for Reflection

1. We saw in the Gospel reading how Jesus upended the people's beliefs about sin and salvation. How can you be part of bringing a message of hope and light to people who are approaching God with an expectation of God being a genie on demand (and often being disillusioned with God's unexpected ways of interacting with them)? Are there areas of your own life that you need to work through disillusionment with the Lord's unexpected ways so that you can be freed up to minister to others authentically in their own struggles with surrendering to God?

2. The "bigger" idea in the Gospel reading is evangelism, reaching out to those trapped in false belief systems with the truth of the Gospel. What are two practical ways in which you can begin to reach out to those holding false beliefs? If you pray for God to change a person's heart (an important first step), will you be confident in how you speak to them about Jesus? What verses will you have them read in order to begin to show them the truth of the Gospel?

Readings for the Week

Note: For a listing of readings for the Roman Catholic Mass, visit this web site:

http://www.usccb.org/bible/readings/022816-third-sunday-lent.cfm

Source(s):

Online Scripture verses for most Bible versions can be found at: http://www.biblegateway.com/

Scripture quotations taken from the NASB